

Uniform Statistical Reporting System

1991 Client Follow-up Study II



Study Description

And

Questionnaire

Statewide Office of Family Court Services
Judicial Council of California
Administrative Office of the Courts

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Uniform Statistical Reporting System Acknowledgments

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Uniform Statistical Reporting System,
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Study Description

1991 Client Follow-up Study II

The 1991 Client Follow-up Study II is the third data collection in a longitudinal study of parents who used court-based mediation to attempt to work out child-custody and visitation plans. The project is part of a program of research entitled The Uniform Statistical Reporting System (USRS), fulfilling the Statewide Office of Family Court Services' legislative mandate to provide statewide statistics that advise family law policy. USRS provides rigorous statistics on issues facing policymakers, judges, attorneys, court personnel, researchers, special-interest groups, and parents who use the family courts.

Objectives:

The 1991 Client Baseline Study¹ (also referred to as the 1991 Snapshot Study) was the first large-scale statewide data collection from a representative cross section of parents who used family court services. That study provided reliable statistics about family court services cases throughout California and, for those participating in child-custody mediation, their experiences in court at that time. The baseline study could not address questions about longer-term outcomes for families.

Two follow-up studies were designed to reinterview parents periodically some years after the mediation sessions covered in the 1991 Client Baseline Study. By the end of the 1991 mediation sessions, some parents had agreed on a parenting plan for their children, some would continue mediating, and some would proceed to a court hearing for a decision on custody and visitation. The 1991 Client Follow-up Study I² was planned to shed light on what happened next: how those parents ultimately formed their parenting plans; how they deviated from those plans; their returns to family court; their relationships with their children; how the parenting plans worked for the children; the parents' retrospective evaluation of their experiences in family court. The 1991 Client Follow-up Study II examined five-year outcomes for the children and attempted to identify their sources of risk and resilience.

Procedures:

At the time of the baseline study, mediation clients were asked to give their permission for the Statewide Office to contact them in the future. The follow-up studies attempted to reinterview only those explicitly consenting to re-contact.

¹A full description of the content, design, and methodology of the study can be found in *The 1991 California Family Court Services Snapshot Study: Data Collection Methods* (1994), Statewide Office of Family Court Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco. For an overview of the results of the study, see *Report 1: Families, Cases, and Client Feedback* (1992), Statewide Office of Family Court Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco.

²A full description of the content, design, and methodology of the study can be found in *The 1993 Client Baseline Study: Data Collection Methods* (1995), Statewide Office of Family Court Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco.

The 1991 Client Baseline Study used self-administered questionnaires, which the clients filled out immediately before and after their mediation sessions in the family court services' offices. Both follow-up studies combined two methods: a mail survey and a telephone survey of those not responding to the mail survey.

The 1991 Baseline Study collected information about 82 percent of all court-based mediation sessions that took place throughout the state during the study period, a large enough proportion to provide representative data about court mediation in California. Eighty-four percent (2,274) of the parents participating in the Snapshot Study mediation sessions consented to future contact. Follow-up Study I succeeded in locating 85 percent (1,944) of those mothers and fathers and reinterviewed 80 percent of those located and eligible (1,532). (Respondents became ineligible if, at the time of the follow-up, they had reconciled with the other parent, if they had lost parental rights, or if all of their children included in the 1991 study were over seventeen.) Follow-up Study II located 69 percent of those who were interviewed in the first follow-up (1,053) and reinterviewed 85 percent of those located and eligible (867).³

Use of The Findings:

The data collected in this five-year follow-up study offers an unprecedented opportunity to examine long-term outcomes for children and families and to gain some insight into how families adapt in the years after they are seen in family court.⁴ These findings will be an important resource for those who care about the best interests of children, including the courts, legislators, attorneys, counselors, and parents. The results of the earlier studies have been incorporated in parent education programs, mediator trainings and workshops, and judicial education. The data have also contributed to legislative hearings and have been included in testimony to state and federal commissions. Results have appeared in the media and have been presented to professional conferences, nationally and internationally as well as in California.

³*The 1991 Client Baseline Follow-up Study II: Data Collection Methods* (1997), Statewide Office of Family Court Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco.

⁴For some discussion of the implications of the sample attrition see, *The 1991 Client Baseline Follow-up Study II: Data Collection Methods* (1997), Statewide Office of Family Court Services, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco.